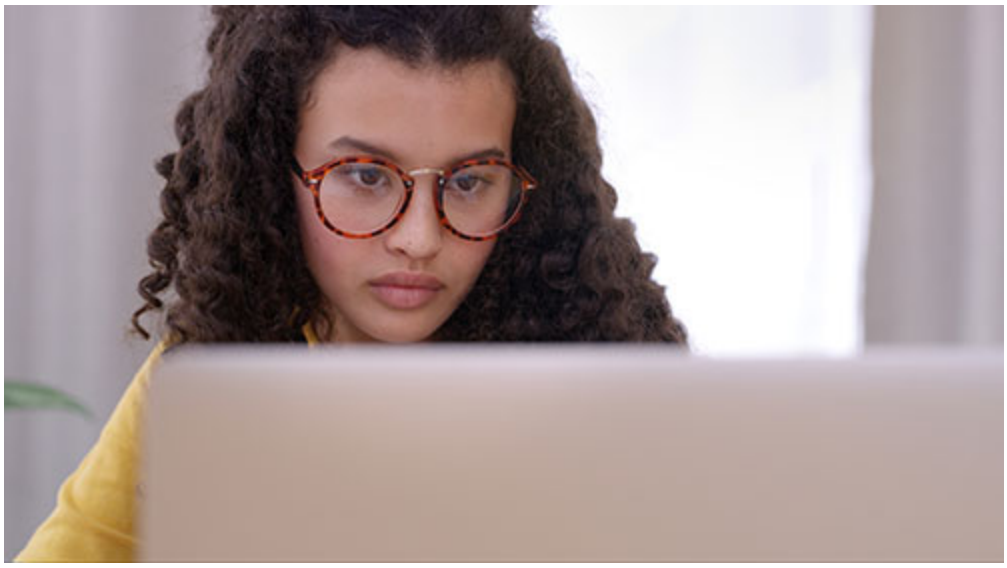
Accommodations Toolkit

Preferential Seating: Research

This fact sheet on **preferential seating** is part of the *Accommodations Toolkit* published by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO). It summarizes information and research findings on preferential seating as an accommodation.[1]



What is preferential seating? Preferential seating is interpreted differently by many educators and researchers. Common interpretations include the student being "close to the teacher," "away from distractions," and "in the front of the room" (Byrnes, 2008).

What are the research findings on who should use this accommodation? Preferential seating has benefited some students with disabilities who are easily distracted, including those with tics (Bruins, 2005; Packer, 2005). Accommodation plans should describe the action needed for the specific student receiving preferential seating (e.g., "seated away from noise of windows") (Byrnes, 2008).

What are the research findings on implementation of preferential seating? Three studies were located that addressed the frequency of use of preferential seating. No identified studies examined the effect of preferential seating on student performance.

- Two studies found that preferential seating was one of the most frequently used testing accommodations (Bruins, 2005) and instructional accommodations (Byrnes, 2008) on student Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).
- Another study found that preferential seating was one of the most frequently reported classroom strategies used for students with tics (Packer, 2005).

What perceptions do students and teachers have about preferential seating? Two research studies examined teacher perceptions on the use of preferential seating.

- One study found that both special education and general education teachers perceived preferential seating to mean "close to the teacher" and "away from distractions." However, general education teachers also perceived preferential seating as "close to the board," while special education teachers did not (Byrnes, 2008).
- Another study found that preferential seating was perceived to be a "somewhat helpful" accommodation by general and special education teachers (Detrick-Grove, 2016).

What have we learned overall? There is a need for additional research on the use of preferential seating because only four studies were identified and those four only addressed the frequency and perceptions of this accommodation. No identified studies examined the effects of preferential seating on student performance, so there is a particular need for research in this area. Nevertheless, educators perceived preferential seating to be somewhat helpful to students.

Footnotes

[1]
Research on preferential seating summarized here is also available in NCEO's searchable *Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Bibliography* (https (https://nceo.info/Resources/bibliographies):://nceo.info/Resources/bibliographies (https://nceo.info/Resources/bibliographies)) and in NCEO syntheses of research from 1999 through 2017 (see summaries for: 1999-2001 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/TechReport34.pdf), 2002-2004 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tech45/Technical45.pdf), 2005-2006 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tech47/TechReport47.pdf), 2007-2008 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tech56/TechnicalReport56.pdf), 2009-2010 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Tech65/TechnicalReport65.pdf), 2011-2012 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Synthesis94/Synthesis94.pdf), 2013-2014 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/Report402/NCEOReport402.pdf), 2015-2016 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOReport412.pdf), 2017 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOReport423.pdf), 2018 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOReport423.pdf), 2019 (https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOReport433.pdf). See the reports and online bibliography for additional information about the criteria used to identify studies included in this fact sheet.

References

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